New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1946

Volume VII, Number 8 • *Yearly Subscription $25.00* • Week of May 6, 1946

1946 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1945 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
*Are You With It?	113
*Billion Dollar Baby	61
Brighten the Corner	74
*Carousel	226
Day Before Spring (The)	92
*Deep Are the Roots	160
*Dream Girl	66
Dunnigan's Daughter	54
French Touch (The)	77
*Glass Menagerie (The)	234
Hamlet	70
Home of the Brave	51
Mermaids Singing (The)	86
Polonaise	149
*Pygmalion	57
*Red Mill (The)	141
Rugged Path (The)	109
*State of the Union	102
Strange Fruit	82
Up in Central Park	280
You Touched Me	164

•

1944 Vol.

*Anna Lucasta	143
Bloomer Girl	118
*Dear Ruth	56
*Follow the Girls	222
*Harvey	95
*I Remember Mama	111
On the Town	45
*Song of Norway	149

•

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

•

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of May 6, 1946*

1946 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1946
Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
Antigone	450
*Apple of His Eye	463
*Born Yesterday	466
*Call Me Mister	403
Candida	412
Duchess Misbehaves (The)	456
Flamingo Road	429
He Who Gets Slapped	426
I Like It Here	421
January Thaw	469
Jeb	446
Joy Forever (A)	493
Little Brown Jug	438
*Lute Song	459
*Magnificent Yankee (The)	477
Nellie Bly	481
*O Mistress Mine	474
*Show Boat	496
Song of Bernadette (The)	418
*St. Louis Woman	415
*This, Too, Shall Pass	400
*Three to Make Ready	434
Truckline Cafe	441
Winter's Tale (The)	486
Woman Bites Dog	407
Would-Be Gentleman (The)	490

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of May 6, 1946*

•

THEATRE OPENINGS
"Call Me Mister"
"Woman Bites Dog"
"This, Too, Shall Pass"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC. : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"This, Too, Shall Pass"

The New York Times

MAY 1, 1946

Plea for Tolerance

By LEWIS NICHOLS

In "This, Too, Shall Pass," Don Appell has turned a playwright's eye on the question of religious tolerance. As it opened last evening at the Belasco, however, it was unfortunately clear that he had not also turned a playwright's practiced hand. Mr. Appel's intentions are above reproach, but his product is flabby and weak. The author has clouded his themes with a good deal of writhing writing, and as his own director he has permitted, or ordered, his players to cling so close to the line of bathos they often tumble over. "This, Too, Shall Pass" is another of those cases of the good heart being not strong enough to support the body.

* * *

Mr. Appell's play is based on the Christian and Jewish religions, and how their distinctions and accompanying prejudices work on the members of a midwestern family. The son of the house comes home from the Pacific with a soldier friend. The daughter knows that the visitor is a Jew, but wishes to marry him; the father knows and still considers him as a son. The mother, who had been committee chairman for tolerance, turns suddenly against the marriage, and as a sacrifice, her own son flings himself under his friend's departing automobile. The son dies, the father tells his wife he never had understood her, the mother is left alone when the girl goes off to New York with her fiance.

Something could be made of the theme, although not by Mr. Appell in his present mood of purple writing, and of setting down two or three cliches when one would be more than enough. The characters say the expected things, in the expected way—eg: "We'll dance and we'll laugh and we'll be very, very happy." The acting is of two moods only. At the beginning, before the mother feels the tug of the religious silver cord, the characters dance up and down stairs in a sort of conga line. Towards the end, they stand in attitudes, wringing their hands, speaking slowly in low, vibrant voices. As the Jewish boy, Sam Wanamaker gives a human performance, but Ralph Morgan, Cathryn Givney, Jan Sterling and Walter Starkey are troubled both by script and direction. Raymond Sovey's setting looks too comfortably homelike for most of the activities of "This, Too, Shall Pass." Those activities are just unreal.

'THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS.'

Play by Don Appell; setting by Raymond Sovey; staged by Don Appell; presented by Richard Krakeur and David Shay at the Belasco Theater, Tuesday evening, April 30, 1946. The cast:

Janet Alexander	Jan Sterling
Martha Alexander	Kathryn Givney
Dr. Steven Alexander	Ralph Morgan
Mac Sorrell	Sam Wanamaker
Buddy Alexander	Walter Starkey

New York Post

MAY 1, 1946

'This, Too, Shall Pass' Plea for Racial Tolerance

By Vernon Rice

Just how liberal is a liberal?

That question is raised by the play, "This, Too, Shall Pass," which came into the Belasco last night under the guidance of Richard Krakeur and David Shay.

Don Appell, the playwright, apparently feels that one really doesn't know until the test of the theories a Liberal expounds hits home.

And that is exactly where he places his story—in the home of a middle-Western doctor and his family. There is the doctor, his wife, a daughter and a son. The son has just returned from the Pacific bringing with him his buddy, a Jew.

The wife has been busy serving on all sorts of war and tolerance committees and living the kind of life a wife of a successful doctor should. There is family pride and affection and all goes well until the daughter lets it be known that she wants to marry her brother's pal. Then all goes berserk, even the play.

Plea for Tolerance

There is a need right now for a strong plea for racial tolerance in the theatre, but "This, Too, Shall Pass" is not it. Serious and sincere though the play's intent may be, its execution borders on the amateur and when the playwright hits a snag, he turns to melodrama.

The friend is ordered out of the house in a never-darken-our-door manner by the mother, the son goes after his chum and is run over by him and the boy dies.

If the playwright failed, most of the players do not. Ralph Morgan gives a restrained and warm performance as the father, Dr. Steven Alexander. To Kathryn Givney falls the hardest chore, that of acting the wife and mother, Martha Alexander, and it is to her credit that the character comes through at all bearable.

Sam Wanamaker, as Mac Sorrell, does a thoroughly creditable job, and Walter Starkey playing the son, Buddy Alexander, joins the ranks of the promising young juveniles. Unfortunately, Jan Sterling overacts the sister's role, that of Janet Alexander.

Raymond Sovey provided a workmanlike one-set interior.

****

DAILY NEWS

MAY 1, 1946

'This, Too, Shall Pass,' a Sincere, Inexpert Drama About Prejudice

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In the case of the drama which was presented last evening at the Belasco, I think one should take the will for the deed. "This, Too, Shall Pass," by Don Appell, is an honestly intended and inexpertly written play about two soldiers who come back to peace and discover that there still is prejudice on the part of a Christian against a Jew.

Mr. Appell directed his own drama, and his direction, combined with some intelligent work on the part of a cast of five actors, makes "This, Too, Shall Pass" sound better than it looks. The quiet persuasiveness of Sam Wanamaker, Ralph Morgan, Jan Sterling, Kathryn Givney and Walter Starkey almost leads one to forget or forgive a baldly contrived scenario and some David Belasco lines.

Mr. Appell's story is of two young men who have found brotherhood in Pacific foxholes and who return to the Midwestern home of one of them. Here everything begins to look wonderful—a nice home, a fine young sister ready to marry her brother's best friend, great hopes of resuming interrupted educations and careers.

Mother Interferes.

Then the girl's mother learns that the visiting ex-soldier is Jewish. It is all right . . . but. The mother, who has always thought of herself as without prejudice, can't face the mixing of faiths in her own family. She can find no sound reason for objecting, because the young Jewish veteran is as fine a man as there is; her attempt to thwart the romance is instinctive, rather than thought out.

There is an arbitrarily contrived offstage motor accident in which the mother's son is fatally injured. The Jewish boy does get the girl, and the mother just about loses her husband, as she should, and the playwright makes his point that religious prejudice is pretty silly when it is examined in a little detail. But Mr. Appell has made a better point than he has a play.

Mr. Morgan, back from the films and airwaves, plays the father of the household, and Miss Givney is the mother. Miss Sterling is an attractive daughter, Mr. Starkey is a forthright son who learned that there is no prejudice in foxholes, and Mr. Wanamaker plays the visitor with quiet effect.

PM

MAY 2, 1946

—Kronenberger—

A Mishandled Problem Play

PM Reviews

It is a very healthful thing that Broadway is coming more and more cleanly to grips with the social and racial problems animating the world. There is no longer, for example, any stammering—indeed, there is a good deal of extremely sharp language—about anti-Negro and anti-Semitic prejudice and discrimination. All this is fine, yet it is not without a flaw. For together with sound and valuable plays on such topics, there must creep in other plays that seem confused, half-baked, intemperate and even opportunistic—plays that shed no real light and generate no valid emotions. One of these, it seems to me, is Mr. Appell's *This, Too, Shall Pass*—a work that may be granted its good intentions, but certainly nothing more.

Mr. Appell tells of a young boy who, on being mustered out of the Army, brings home his buddy—a fine fellow who had saved the boy's life. He and the boy's sister have been writing to each other for years, are in love when they meet, and want to be married. But it turns out that the visitor is a Jew, and that the girl's mother—though an active liberal in the community—most decidedly does not want a Jew for a son-in-law. Having precipitated a realistic situation, Mr. Appell finds it too much for him. He quickly takes refuge in trickery and melodrama, has the son of the house killed in an accident, brings the mother to judgment as a kind of symbolic scourge against civilization, and lets every one else walk out on her.

• • •

This, Too, Shall Pass could never have been a good play, because Mr. Appell is patently a bad playwright. His dialogue, his exposition, his character-drawing are all clumsy and crude. But he is no sounder with a problem than with a play. He has not only cheated by introducing inapposite melodrama; he has charged the atmosphere of *This, Too, Shall Pass* with something quite excessive to the subject. It is all too sentimental, high-pitched and overheated; and Mr. Appell is so anxious to get round to his indictment that he refuses to deal sanely with his situation. The "liberal" mother in *This, Too, Shall Pass*—like the "liberal" older daughter in *Deep Are the Roots*—is a type that needs to be rigorously examined and exposed. The type is a dangerous and treacherous one because of the way it tends to revert under pressure, but it is not innately villainous, and nothing is gained by treating it in a hysterical, hiss-the-villain fashion. Again, though the situation in Mr. Appell's play clearly invites a plea for tolerance, it also demands a little realistic fact-finding. Many mixed marriages do raise issues and do involve adjustments; it is even hinted here that the boy's mother will be far from pleased by the idea of a Gentile daughter-in-law. Mr. Appell is right to call for tolerance, but he ought not to do it sentimentally.

His direction, I fear, is about on a par with his playwriting. Of the five members of the cast, only Sam Wanamaker, as the young Jew, performs with any credit or credibility. —Louis Kronenberger

---

Journal and American

MAY 1, 1946

'This, Too, Shall Pass' Opens at the Belasco

By ROBERT GARLAND

There're times when I wish the fashioners of these so-called problem plays dealing with intolerance—racial, religious, what they will!—would display more genuine belief in their basic argument. Following last night's final curtain at the Belasco, this is one of them. In his effort to drive home his point, Don Appell, the playwright, falls back upon an extraneous, implausible offstage happening.

Frequently, this has been so.

In "Deep Are the Roots," playwrights d'Usseau and Gow dragged in a missing watch to fortify their case against the Southerners. In "Home of the Brave," "Strange Fruit," "Jeb" and "Flamingo Road," playwrights Arthur Laurents, Lillian Smith, Robert Ardrey and the Dixie-baiting Wilders weren't exactly on the level with the figures of intolerance they displayed as horrible examples of what bigotry can be.

And is, here in America.

Now, in "This, Too, Shall Pass," Don Appell concocts an off-stage accident to prove that his mid-Western Christians are unworthy of their designation. Thinking about it during the performance, talking about it between the acts, worrying about it all the way home, I fail to see what the off-stage accident has to do with the lamentable fact that there're Christian women who rebel at Jewish sons-in-law.

Or even vice versa.

• • •

Mac Ex Machina

Even when that son-in-law is as fine a former fighting man as Mac Sorrell. This Jewish youngster is the god from Playwright Appell's machine. Returning with his pal and fellow soldier to the Steven Alexander mansion in a small mid-Western town, Mac becomes the apple of the household's eye. Before a week is past, every Alexander is revolving affectionately about him.

All four of them.

Papa Alexander, whose name is Steven. Mama Alexander, whose name is Martha. Daughter Alexander, whose name is Janet. And Son Alexander, who is Bubby to his family and buddy to the Mac Sorrell with whom he fought and by whom his life was saved in the fracas overseas. Neither Damon nor Pythias has anything on the brotherly devotion existing between Gentile Buddy and Jewish Mac.

On Buddy's brotherhood especially.

Buddy loves Mac. Janet loves Mac. Alexander loves Mac. Martha loves Mac until he becomes engaged to Janet, admitting—insisting, really—that he is a Jew. This admittance brings out the intolerance that has been lying dormant in Mama Alexander all the while. It is she who cries out bitterly against Jewry, leading to Buddy's death and Janet's marriage to his accidental killer, gentlest of Jews.

Mac, ex machina!

• • •

Cast Is Helpful

Were Don Appell more skillful than he is in "This, Too, Shall Pass" at the Belasco, his characters might seem more real and the situations in which they find themselves involved might be more believable. Then, again, they mightn't. As things stand, characters and situations escape the ardent Mr. Appell when his drama turns to melodrama and his people turn to puppets.

The cast helps mightily.

Most of it, at any rate. Especially the Sam Wanamaker our South Pacific has seen in the Eddie Dowling role in "The Glass Menagerie" and Broadway has seen as an earnest young man in "Cafe Crown" and a Russian soldier in "Counter-Attack." Mr. Wanamaker brings skill, charm and a disarming simplicity to Mac Sorrell, although I'm not sure Mac's mother is going to admire his Janet Alexander.

I don't; not really.

As played by Jan Sterling, the Alexander who is Janet makes more faces than impression. As the Alexander who is Buddy, Walter Starkey is fresh and likable. Kathryn Givney does what she can with the Alexander who is Martha. Ralph Morgan is in true tradition as the Alexander who is Steven. It is the playwright's fault that Steven is sound asleep upstairs when he could bring "This, Too, Shall Pass" to an earlier and happier conclusion.

This, too, is desirable!

New York World-Telegram

MAY 1, 1946

Belasco Play Treats of Religious Tolerance

By BARCLAY HUDSON.

The latest of the season's parade of tolerance plays made its bow at the Belasco last night when Richard Krakeur and David Shay presented Don Appell's "This, Too, Shall Pass."

This time the subject was religious tolerance and the playwright hung his plot on two young men home from the wars. One, the son of a successful surgeon of the Middle West, had become attached to the other older man, a Jew, almost to the point of worship.

The son had introduced his sister to his friend by letter and the two had corresponded more than three years. Through this medium their friendship had ripened to the point where, when the young GIs finally got to the doctor's home it seemed a foregone conclusion that boy and girl would marry. Even father was agreeable. Mother was the rub.

The upshot of the matter was a wild session in which boy gets girl, with the curtain falling on a preposterous state of affairs.

It is hard to say just what Mr. Appell's aim was unless it was to show what the liberal and the narrow points of view might do when embraced in the same household. Perhaps he meant all this might not have happened if there had been no religious bigotry. You see the play and take your choice.

His vehicle was in the hands of an excellent cast on the whole. Sam Wanamaker as the Jewish GI, and Walter Starkey as the son held up admirably all the way through except that the former could learn a new gesture for his hands. Ralph Morgan and Kathryn Givney as the doctor and his wife were highly satisfactory as was Jan Sterling as the daughter with the exception of one or two spots where she overdid things a little.

New York Herald Tribune

MAY 1, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Doesn't Pass

DON APPELL attacks anti-Semitism with more zeal than skill in "This, Too, Shall Pass." The new play at the Belasco is a brave and disturbing indictment of bigotry. By leveling a finger at those who speak loudest against intolerance until they find they are actually consumed by it, the author makes point after point with telling force and eloquence. The more the pity that the structure of his deep-felt diatribe is a dramatic house of cards. The performances are there to give body to the best of the lines. The plotting of the situations is at best fumbling; at worst embarrassingly preposterous.

* * *

The original premise of "This, Too, Shall Pass" is both valid and challenging. A doctor's son returns to a Mid-West community from Pacific fighting with his buddy. The latter already has fallen in love by correspondence with the kid's sister. Since the family greets him as a son, he is trapped into thinking he might be accepted as a son-in-law, even though he is Jewish. In Appell's exposition there is sensitive insight into characters, a nice modulation of human relationships and the springboard for a stern theatrical resolution. That the climax winds up in the accidental killing of the Christian boy and a lot of elliptical and hysterical dialogue does not entirely nullify the fine things in the play. It is only too bad that it is so disappointing.

* * *

For the bitterness which might have been distilled with a crystal-like quality out of the scene in which the doctor's wife forbids her daughter to marry a Jew and turns the latter out of her house, is smoked up like a faulty kerosene lamp chimney in the final passages. The right-thinking surgeon likens her anti-Semitism to a cancer which he has no scalpel to remove. The son dies from the accident for want of faith that the world he fought for was a better place to live in. His sister and the Jew go off, or at least off-stage, in quest of something which Appell has never succinctly stated. His melodramatic deus ex machina is too obvious an out to make "This, Too, Shall Pass," a fine or reasonable play.

* * *

To the credit of the company at the Belasco, it shores up all the best of the passages. Ralph Morgan is especially good as the doctor who does not realize that he has an incipient leader of a pogrom for a wife. Kathryn Givney, in the latter role, has considerable difficulty in switching from the gracious hostess of the man who saved her boy's life to a Jew-baiter, but blame the author for that. Sam Wanamaker is excellent as the social outcast in a supposedly liberal household and Jan Sterling is not far behind him as the oe-devilled heroine. Appell's staging does not help them one whit. It is even more clumsy than his dramatic construction.

The Sun

MAY 1, 1946

'This, Too, Shall Pass' Very Crude Drama of a G. I.'s Anti-Semitic Mother.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"This, Too, Shall Pass," written by Don Appell, is a play of strong intentions but of scant dramatic effect. The writing is unskillful, the characters unconvincing, and in the final act things become wildly theatrical. Richard Krakeur and David Shay made the presentation last night at the Belasco.

Here is a story of a young G. I. who fought the Japs in what he though was a war against intolerance and oppression and returns to find bigotry on his very doorstep.

Buddy is a Christian. Mac, his comrade of the Pacific jungles, is a Jew. On one occasion Buddy's life was saved by Mac and Buddy worships him. The Jewish boy has corresponded for three years with his friend's sister and they find themselves in love when he comes to visit Buddy's home. But the girl's mother, discovering that Mac is a Jew, forbids the marriage. She is bitter in her objections and in her antagonism. There is an eventual elopement, but not until tragedy has come to the household.

The play is loosely constructed. The dialogue is frequently pretentious, and the character of the mother, a bustling committee woman in her small Mid-Western town and supposedly a liberal, is completely unbelievable. And it seems altogether incredible that the father, although gentle and ineffectual, could have lived all those years with Martha Alexander without discovering how fanatical and fiendish she actually is.

The evening's best performance is turned in by Sam Wanamaker as the Jewish boy. He plays with restraint and gives considerable force to some of his scenes. Kathryn Givney is quite lost as the anti-Semitic mother, whose charm vanishes when she learns the truth about the guest in her house. Jan Sterling has the trying role of the spirited but irresolute daughter and Ralph Morgan is as real as the script permits him to be in the character of the bewildered father. Walter Starkey gives life—sometimes a little too much of it—to the part of Buddy, who is often unbearably adolescent.

"This, Too, Shall Pass" is another—and perhaps the last—of the season's racial problem plays. It is a very crude and unorganized drama, and also quite a dull one.

"Call Me Mister"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

APRIL 19, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

O. K. Mister!

VITALITY and finesse are blended happily in "Call Me Mister." This G. I. show about G. I. Joes is something of a boisterous romp as it takes satirical cognizance of military life, problems of reconversion, Park Avenue, the deep South and even South American dances. But there is no dearth of artful showmanship in the new revue at the National. Harold Rome has written a heaping handful of catchy songs for the production; Arnold Auerbach has kept his sketches at an exceedingly high entertainment level and eager and talented performers do the rest. Reconversion has been effected with propitious and exciting results in the newest musical in town.

* * *

It is no mere catch-line that almost every one connected with "Call Me Mister" was in uniform not so long ago. The services did not dullen the wits of the collaborators. The show switches with facility from such dead serious numbers as "Going Home Train," "The Red Ball Express" or four chapters in a war-time love story to the brilliant kidding of "Welcome Home," in which a normal vet is treated like a psycho, or the hilarious lampoon of the A. A. F., "Off We Go." It embraces engaging ballet interludes by Maria Karnilova and David Nillo, agile tap dancing by Bill Calahan and Betty Lou Holland and a blues torch song by Betty Garrett. As a topical revue it has a bit of everything and most of it is enchanting.

* * *

It is difficult to single out particular performances, so even is the texture of the acting. Miss Garrett, however, deserves special mention for her brilliant travesty of samba-rumba rhythms, "South America, Take It Away" and her general resourcefulness in filling in on a dozen sketches, while Jules Munshin discloses a comic talent of promising proportions. The latter wanders through skit after skit with disarming authority, and even has the audacity to take off Maurice Evans, as he imagines that actor to be a train announcer. Danny Scholl and Paula Bane are attractive in the romantic numbers; Lawrence Winters sings with simple eloquence, and Chandler Cowles makes a recitative, that might have been corny, very effective indeed.

* * *

The ex-G. Is and erstwhile U. S. O. entertainers have had a major break in material. The Rome music and lyrics are as excellent as they are varied, ranging from simple songs to splendidly integrated choral numbers. Auerbach does not always get a hit in twenty odd sketches, but his batting average is way up there. Robert H. Gordon has directed the revue with pace and flavor and Lester Polakov has directed it with imaginative and unpretentious taste. "Call Me Mister is a captivating show. It is fresh, vigorous and what was least to have been expected, it has great style. It brightens the waning season no end.

'CALL ME MISTER.'

A new revue with music and lyrics by Harold J. Rome; sketches by Arnold Auerbach; production directed by Robert H. Gordon; dances by John Wray; musical direction by Lehman Engel; scenery by Lester Polakov; costumes by Grace Houston; presented by Melvyn Douglas and Herman Levin at the National Theater, Thursday evening, April 18, 1946. The cast includes Betty Garrett, Jules Munshin, Bill Callahan, Lawrence Winters, George Hall, Harry Clark, Paula Bane, Maria Karnilova, Alan Manson, Danny Scholl, Betty Lou Holland, David Nillo, George Irving and Glenn Turnbull.

DAILY NEWS

APRIL 19, 1946

'Call Me Mister' a Fine, Funny, Brisk Revue by and With Ex-GIs

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The title of the new revue at the National Theatre is "Call Me Mister"—but I call it grand. It is funny, well-paced and good-looking; it is refreshing and friendly; its company is ready, willing and able, and it has some very good song numbers. "Call Me Mister" has captured the fleeting spirit of the revue type of entertainment—a spirit which is a mixture of lightness, intimacy and wit.

The show seems to be the only postwar project which has really got going and is in a fair way to win the peace. It is, you should know by now, an outgrowth of the war, and an admirable one. Produced by Melvyn Douglas and Herman Levin, and written by Harold Rome and Arnold Auerbach, it is an ex-service job from top to bottom; every man and woman in it is an ex-GI or an ex-service entertainer.

At the outset, the chorus announces that "Call Me Mister" is no relief or benefit project—except in so far as it benefits and relieves the people involved (and it should solve their employment problems for a long time ahead). Then the revue gets going with a fine male chorus aboard a troop train singing "Going Home Train." It's a good song, very smartly arranged, and from it you get the immediate feeling that here is going to be a show with individuality.

Pace and Spirit.

This feeling never deserted me last evening. For a moment or two I thought a ballad here and there was a shade too long; but these moments passed and always the pace and spirit were perked right up again.

The sketches are all first class, and there are many of them. The first one is a neat, satirical job about an ex-GI returning home to a family which has been reading magazine articles on how to rehabilitate the returned soldier. The next one is a hilarious number depicting what would have happened if Paul Revere had had to go through modern army red tape to get a horse in order to warn people that the British were coming.

Song by song, sketch by sketch, number by number, "Call Me Mister" not only moves—it progresses. Betty Garrett makes her bow with "Surplus Blues," a funny lyric about a lonesome waitress in a closed army camp. There is an attractive ballet about the corner drug store back home, with Maria Karnilova and David Nillo leading some good dancing.

Next there is a sharp, extremely funny sketch about an infantryman's idea of what life in the Air Forces must be, when all he knows about it is what he has seen in the movies. Hollywood has not had such a delightful ribbing in a long time, and Jules Munshin, Alan Manson, George Hall, Harry Clark and others play it with relish.

Second Part Holds Up.

Another song, "The Red Ball Express," done by Lawrence Winters and a quartet, again stamps Rome as a composer and lyrist whom the war has taken far from Tin Pan Alley—praise be! There is a colorful first-act-finale set in a department store, with GIs and WACs buying civilian outfits.

I was fearful, at intermission, that this couldn't last—that the show would run down. But it kept on going up, starting the second frame with a wonderfully amusing and musically clever old English Christmas song, Park Ave. style. Here again Miss Garrett is a great help.

And so the program goes to an end which comes much too soon—for I wanted to hang around with all those nice people for an hour or two more. A sketch about a soldier barber in civilian trade, with a fine blackout ending; some breezy dancing by Betty Lou Holland and Bill Callahan; a comic plaint by Miss Garrett about South American dances, and a shrewd, clever, not too gentle poke at Southern senators and representatives.

"Call Me Mister" is a rare revue, and one of its most admirable qualities is that is is spotless. There isn't a leer or a sex joke in it, and it's a fine thing to know that a revue can be funny without being dirty.

Robert H. Gordon directed skillfully; John Wray's dance direction is equally good; Lester Polakov's sets are in the light and unpretentious spirit of the revue itself; Lehman Engel's orchestra is a dandy, and the arrangements of Mr. Rome's score by Ben Ludlow, Charles Huffine and Julian Work are notably intelligent.

PM Exclusive

APRIL 21, 1946

—Kronenberger

GI Joe Comes Home in Style

PM Reviews

It required a war to give Broadway its first really satisfactory musical of the season. *Call Me Mister* has assembled a bunch of former GIs and WACs and camp-show entertainers in a gay, springy, youthful revue—one of those things you sit through with relish and leave with regret. A kind of valedictory to Selective Service, *Call Me Mister* is also a salute to Spring.

It is, to be sure, anything but a perfect show. It sometimes bumps as well as bounces; many of its sketches were thought up with more wit than they were thought through; some of its dialogue needs more expert performers to give it punch; some of its tunes are a little too reminiscent. But the weaknesses of *Call Me Mister* are as easily understood as they are forgiven, are bound up with its youthfulness and informality. And they are more than offset, not only by the prevailingly pleasant tone, but by the high points of the evening, which are really high.

Concerned in the loosest way with the GI's return to civilian life, *Call Me Mister* spanks along, now sentimental, now satirical, now glancing back, now looking ahead, sometimes just taking its fun where it finds it. Joe dreams from overseas about the corner drugstore; parents who have read too many alarming magazine articles welcome Joe home as though he were a man with two heads; waitresses sigh for the days of uniforms; the housing shortage comes in for mention, and Army red tape for razzing. These things push the show along, but better things make it pop. If Harold Rome's tunes are seldom more than agreeable, his lyrics are the season's merriest, and the makings of such amusing ditties as *Military Life* and *Yuletide, Park Avenue*.

Then there is at least one extremely funny skit, fleshing an infantryman's idea of how the Air Corps lived—all Hollywood luxury and Mayfair toniness. And in *South America, Take It Away*, Betty Garrett, as a canteen hostess half dead and half disjointed from dancing rhumbas and sambas, deservedly brings down the house.

• • •

With her looks, voice and comedy gifts, Miss Garrett is very much of an asset to *Call Me Mister*. As the chief male comic, Jules Munshin cavorts indefatigably and with a good deal of brightness. There's a lot of fast, straight-Broadway dancing, including tap. The best of the songs, *Going Home Train*, is a very effective sort of choral blues; several other serious and sentimental songs are very well sung by Lawrence Winters. The orchestra plays with zip, and the show moves along with dispatch. Beyond its gaiety, it has a kind of decency and no mind for dirt. There are certainly things wrong with *Call Me Mister*, but I don't see how anyone can fail to like it.

—Louis Kronenberger

Journal and American

APRIL 19, 1946

'Call Me Mister' At the National

By ROBERT GARLAND

Excuse it, please, but "Call Me Mister" has everything it takes to make a grand night of theatre-going. Presented last evening at the National by Melvyn Douglas and Herman Levin, with words and music by Harold Rome, sketches by Arnold Auerbach, dances by John Wray, backgrounds by Lester Polakov, costumes by Grace Houston, direction by Robert Gordon and an uncommonly worthy orchestra conducted by Lehman Engel—

Well, if a drama critic is still supposed to know anything about the theatre, I can't remember when I've had a better time on Broadway. Song-and-dance shows such as this ex-servicemen's, and ex-servicewomen's, revue are a rarity between the Square known as Times and the Circle called Columbus. For "Call Me Mister" is youthful without being juvenile funny without being forced, satiric without being bitter.

Best are the words and music of Harold Rome. Having dropped the "S. S." which used to stand for "social significence" in the middle of his name, Mr. Rome combines lyrics that are brilliant without being strained with tunes that are memorable without being derivitive. And the sketches of Arnold Auerbach are appropriate companion-pieces. In no manner of speaking does "Call Me Mister" let you, or its originators, down.

From where I sit typewriting a report, this soldier show in mufti looks like a big hit, and a lasting one.

• • •

Here's Why

Beginning at the beginning, ending at the end, I'll tell you why this soldier show in mufti looks like a big hit, and a lasting one. Here's your scene by scene report. After an opening interlude during which soldiers, sailors, marines and canteen girls sing a kind, if passing, word in praise of drama critics and General Eisenhower, a group of ex-GI's offers "Goin' Home Train," one of the revue's most moving numbers.

This is followed by "Welcome Home," in which a returning veteran manages to maintain his sanity amid the insanities of postwar peace. Then our old friend Paul Revere tries to get himself a horse while surrounded by the red tape of World War II. After a "Surplus Blues" lament and a "Drugstore" memory song, the AAF comes into some elegant "Winged Victory" spoofing. "Red Ball Express," of which you'll be hearing, follows.

"Military Life" contains more truth than meets the ear. "Yuletide, Park Ave." is in the treasured "Hammacher, Schlemmer, I Love You" tradition. "Once Over Lightly" is funny, if less original, than the "Face on the Dime" which comes after. "A Home of Our Own" takes up the housing shortage. "His Old Man" is tender and touching. "South Wind," ending with the "Senator's Song," takes the funny South for a well earned ride.

But the number you never get enough of is "South America, Take It Away," a latter-day classic projected classically by Betty Garrett.

• • •

Here's How

This Betty Garrett is first lady among the GI's asking to be mistered. Her "South America, Take It Away" is a show-stopper. The post of first gentleman is divided among Bill Callahan, whose best number gives the show its title; Jules Munshin, who's wonderful when not doing imitations, and Lawrence Winters, whose solo work in "Goin' Home Train," "Red Ball Express" and "Face on the Dime" are practically perfection.

Virginia Davis, Meyer's darling daughter making her Broadway debut, is more than promising. Especially as The Mother in "Yuletide, Park Ave." Maria Karnolova and David Nillo dance better than well on more than one occasion. Alan Manson, who pops up pleasantly now and then, is the sergeant who impersonated Jane Cowl so Cowlishly in "This Is the Army." So, most happily, things go throughout the evening.

So things go, sometimes clownishly, sometimes satirically, sometimes seriously, but always youthfully, zestfully and entertainingly. So things go, from half past eight to quarter past eleven, against Lester Polakov's imaginative backgrounds, in Grace Houston's colorful costumes, to the strains of Lehman Engel's well-tempered pitmen. Dance director John Wray and production director Robert Gordon assist wholeheartedly...

Sure, I'll call you new civilians at the National "Mister." And I'll be glad to call your "Call Me Mister" the best new show in town.

The New York Times

APRIL 19, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The former service men and the young ladies who came in with them obviously are glad to be back—and the theatre this morning should be glad to have them. "Call Me Mister," which Melvyn Douglas and Herman Levin offered at the National last evening, is one of the cheerful musicals of the year. Its cast and contributors are either late GI or those who entertained them by way of USO, and its spirit is youth. In addition to winning a war or two, the Army and the Navy seem to have kept the interests of the theatre at heart, and peace on Forty-first Street is equally successful. "Call Me Mister" could be named with justice "Call Me Colonel," if rank still held—but everyone takes particular pains to say it doesn't.

* * *

The show is in the form of a revue, and somewhere in its origins there must have been a thread about demobilization. Being intelligent people, those responsible quickly cut the thread and go on to have a brisk and merry time with whatever comes to hand. There are sketches about homecoming, songs about the corner drug store and the waitress who now is "surplus"; but South America also is urged to take back the conga, and certain Southern Senators are urged to behave themselves. In "Call Me Mister" are all moods—the satiric, the sentimental, patriotic, matter-of-fact. And acting the moods are Misters and Misses of fresh and engaging talent.

Since not even the Army did everything right the first time and throughout, some of the revue gets a little lost now and then. A few of the early sketches quietly dig into foxholes, from which not even the energy of the cast can move them. When he has pulled himself together, however, Arnold Auerbach, who wrote them—twice with Arnold B. Horwitt as collaborator—can turn out funny material. The GI's opinion of the Air Force is a satirical matter of champagne, Noel Coward accent and high rank—and let the Air Force sue. The conversation of three Southern Senators, one named Burple, which must be a misprint, is in the best manner of political satire. "Once Over Lightly," about a barber and two ex-GI's, could go in any slapstick revue or burlesque.

* * *

As composer, Harold Rome is one of the heroes of the evening. He has perhaps not written his greatest song for the show, but he has made them singable and light and in the mood of "Call Me Mister." One number, called "Goin' Home Train," seems to have the rhythm of cars homeward bound. "Surplus Blues," about the waitress who frankly misses the Army wolves, is cheerful; a love song, "Along With Me," is good of its type. Continuing the scheme of his earlier "Franklin D. Roosevelt Jones," Mr. Rome now offers "The Face on the Dime," which has a good idea and lyric but fails to be as stirring as the other. "The Red Ball Express," telling of truck drivers in Normandy, is excellent.

But, Mr. Rome aside, it is the people's show. Betty Garrett is the only featured player, a distinction she deserves. She can sing a song clearly and can act comedy character parts as well as just comedy. Jules Munshin, a Bert Lahresque figure, also supplies comedy, as do Harry Clark and George Hall. For a young couple who can dance engagingly, the show offers Betty Lou Holland and Bill Callahan; for a young couple who can sing, Danny Scholl and Paula Bane. Lawrence Winters is an excellent soloist for the "Goin' Home Train," "The Red Ball Express" and "The Face on the Dime." John Wray has designed dances which are lively without being complicated, and the entire cast knows what to do about them. Lester Polakov's settings are simple, Grace Houston's costumes youthful. In sum, "Call Me Mister" is an engaging revue and a credit to Selective Service.

****

New York Post

APRIL 19, 1946

'Call Me Mister' Boasts Vitality and Timely Appeal

By Vernon Rice

Whatever it is that is in an ex-GI's heart when he first hears the word "Mister," that quality has been transposed upon the stage of the National, where that ex-GI revue "Call Me Mister" opened last night.

The sheer joy of hearing the word pronounced warms the soul, and so does the show.

It is probably no news to anyone that the latest addition to the roster of Broadway musicals is composed entirely of men who were in some branch of the Armed Forces during World War II, and that goes for Melvyn Douglas, co-producer with Herman Levin, Harold J. Rome, who wrote the music and lyrics; Arnold Auerbach, the person responsible for the sketches; Robert H. Gordon, the show's director; John Wray, who staged the dances; Lehman Engel, the musical director, and even the scenic designer, Lester Polakov. If a girl performer weren't a Wac or a Wave or some such, she was either a USO trouper, a hospital performer or a canteen entertainer.

Unquestionably that accounts for the spirit of the revue. These people know whereof they speak, sing and dance.

It would be impossible, though, to have as much youthful vitality as is contained in "Call Me Mister," and not have something pretty infectious come from it.

Call It Energy

From the rise of the curtain on the opening number with the men still in uniform, but with their ruptured ducks, and the girls wearing their canteen costumes, to the final curtain, which finds them all in civilian clothes, buoyant energy is all over the place. And it flows from the stage to you.

Much of the musical has a specialized appeal for those just out of uniform, or for those who have someone in that state, or about to be. With the war having been so all-inclusive, that doesn't exclude very many people.

No one can hear Lawrence Winters and the male chorus sing Harold Rome's words and music in the "Goin' Home Train" number and not get goose pimples, nor help but be touched by the "Love Story," which begins with Danny Scholl as a sailor movingly singing "Along With Me" early in the show, and reappears now and then until nearly the end when sailor Scholl is reunited with his wife and has that first look at the baby.

It Is Funny, McGee

Nor can anyone do anything but laugh uproariously at Betty Garrett being the mother believing all the things she read about the condition of the returning soldiers, welcoming her son home.

Anyone who has ever heard of the Army will be put in stitches by the skit "The Army Way," wherein Paul Revere, working under present Army methods, tries to get a horse.

Jules Munshin takes over the comedy end with Alan Manson, George Hall and others in a hilarious version of the infantrymen's idea of the Air Corps.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Munshin and Miss Garrett work hard and successfully in Arnold Auerbach's skits at providing a good many amusing moments.

When Miss Garrett isn't furnishing laughs and her good looks as a wornout canteen hostess sick to death of the conga, she is being the cheery but harassed volunteer worker in a veterans' home-finding bureau, or a grandmother and matriarch of a Park Avenue clan welcoming home its lieutenant, j. g., for Christmas. There is practically nothing the gal can't do.

Jules Munshin rolls "them eyes" and prances from skit to skit being everything from Maurice Evans as a train caller to a Southern Senator. He was graduated from George Olson's orchestra to the theatre via the Army. Munshin is a cross between Reginald Gardner and Groucho Marx, and yet his brand of comedy is definitely his own.

To give variety there is excellent ballet dancing done by Maria Karnilova and David Nillo, and the good old-fashioned tap dancing is done by Bill Callahan and Betty Lou Holland.

Harold Rome's stirring music has been given special attention by the arranger, Ben Ludlow, and the choral work done by Lehman Engel, the musical director, is effective.

Lester Polakov's sets and Grace Houston's costumes have color, imagination and, when demanded, humor.

In "Call Me Mister" are a touch of pathos, a good portion of laughter mixed with pleasant sights and sounds, timely appeal and youthful high spirits.

A revue with those ingredients can't miss.

The Sun

APRIL 19, 1946

'Call Me Mister' Spirited G. I. Revue, and It's Definitely a Hit at National.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

It's the agreeable duty of this department today to report that a really good musical show has come to town—a quick, trim, zestfully performed revue known as "Call Me Mister," which is for G. I. audiences and for practically everybody else. The National Theater has its tenant for the summer—and probably for much longer.

"Call Me Mister" is fresh, spirited and informal. Harold Rome's music and lyrics are excellent and so is the dancing. The costumes and settings are just right and Arnold Auerbach's sketch material is far better than that usually to be found in a topical revue. And the young people of the company, all of whom were in the services in one way or another, are enormously talented.

There were a few moments in the first half of "Call Me Mister"—probably at the time of the Paul Revere sketch—when I began to have doubts about the evening, but the sketch showing an infantryman's idea of how soft life was for the Air Corps sets things right again, and when Betty Garrett comes along in the second half with her "South America, Take It Away" number the show is stopped. By then it's well on the safe side, the hit side.

Miss Garrett, outdoing herself as a singing comedienne, is a delight all evening. Jules Munshin is all over the place and all through the show and very capable he is. Betty Lou Holland and Bill Callahan are one of the best of the dance teams and Maria Karnilova and David Nillo seem to be just the people to have around if you're going to use a ballet in a Broadway song and dance show. The ballet in "Call Me Mister" is introduced charmingly.

There is a lot of engaging stuff in "Call Me Mister." I especially liked the "Going Home Train" number, depicting in song the last ride of a railroad car jammed with discharged G. I.'s; the "Red Ball Express" song of Lawrence Winters and the "Senators' Song," as done by Harry Clark, George Hall and the busy Jules Munshin.

Betty Garrett has a nice number in "Surplus Blues" and she will be stopping the show at every performance with that "South America, Take It Away," in which she rejects the rhumba and associated rhythms. Alan Manson, to be remembered from "This Is the Army," is pleasantly around in all this new G. I. festivity. Robert H. Gordon's direction has kept things moving briskly.

Melvyn Douglas and Herman Levin have come forth with a bright, gingery and good-looking revue. They have assembled an eager and refreshing company. Whether you were in the last war or the war before the last or in no war at all you will have a good time at the National.

"Call Me Mister" is welcome—and it's a hit.

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 19, 1946

'Call Me Mister' a Sparkling Revue

Former GIs Prove They Have Something to Offer

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If the future of America is in the hands of GI Joes and Janes like those involved in "Call Me Mister," nobody need worry. They have talent, vitality and taste. They are conscious of their country's problems and can be good humored about them. They throw all they have into the job, but never oversell you. They quit when work is well done while you still want more.

"Call Me Mister," which opened at the National Theater last night, is bright and balanced. It is the rare revue of which it can be said that of all its listed numbers, not one is bad. Nor is there a fumbling member of the cast.

It is difficult to single out performers or sets, but nothing in the show is more lionized by the audience than Betty Garrett's farewell to Latin dancing.

Satire and Wit.

"Off We Go" is a hilarious satire on the screen's idea of life in the Air Corps. As one of the characters remarks, in a familiar service gripe, being a flier was like being stationed in the Stork Club. From there out the humor rises to an apt climax.

Jules Munshin is a standout in this and several other sketches. He has a flexible face which looks as if at any minute he might satirically crucify Robert Morley's performance as Oscar Wilde. And he constantly brightens stage business with sharply cut gestures.

Munshin also aids ably in a merciless devastation of Southern bigotry that applies aptly to any hypocritical politics. Here, as in his other sketches, Arnold Auerbach writes his situation with a full dressing. There is no dry buildup for a blackout. The matter is invested with humor from the start, and it is humor that grows.

Generous of Talent.

"Call Me Mister" is a dancing and singing show of generous talent. Bill Callahan skips through his numbers like a fresh breeze. David Nillo and Maria Karnilova bring an airy speed and fluidity to the ballets, which John Wray has designed with imagination. They seem modern without being -istic.

There is some expert dancing by the ensembles, particularly by a couple of girls who are difficult to identify from the program. A guess is that one of them is Kate Friedlich.

Lawrence Winters has an expert way with a song, both as to vocal canniness and manner. He adds much of the feeling to "Going Home Train," a sort of soldier's spiritual, gives a rhythm and makes a real tribute out of "Face on the Dime," which the lightest clumsy touch would have made banal.

Paula Bane and Danny Scholl share honors in the sentimental singing which is run through the show on the faint narrative thread of a sailor's return to his wife. "Along with Me" and "When We Meet Again," if not sensational hits, are hummable enough to turn up from bandstands frequently.

There are many other contributors to the show good enough to be mentioned, too many to list.

For instance, there is Betty Lou Holland, a sprightly dancer with a bright baby face for ingenues in the sketches. There is the affirmative comedy of Harry Clark, particularly as the garrulous barber. There is the zany behavior of George Hall, and the appearances of Chandler Cowles, who might have been picked for a posterized representation of the typical American serviceman.

Grace Houston's costumes and Lester Polakov's scenery are pointed and restrained without looking spare. And the direction of Robert H. Gordon keeps the ball rolling at a fine pace.

"Woman Bites Dog"

The New York Times

APRIL 18, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"Woman Bites Dog" is about the fourth estate, which is the estate of angels, although some of them have fallen here and there. Bella and Samuel Spewack have taken up three of the latter, two with military or naval titles and the other a female relative, all newspaper owners. There is a program note to say the characters are quite fictional, and that covers possible complaints and takes care of lobby gossip as well. It remains for an outsider, then, only to say that their fictional contrivance is perhaps not so funny as it might be. Te woman bites the dog only after a long period of growling; the new play at the Belasco aims at a three-act satire and ends as a sketch drawn out thin over three acts. Newspaper plays should use sharper presses.

* * *

Commander Southworth is the main butt for the Spewacks war against the enemy. He is still fighting the New Deal, F. D. R., Britain, Stalin, Truman and Wallace; on the side he invents, composes poetry and starts off on vast crusades. Major Southworth, owner of a paper elsewhere, is the disillusioned man, who likes to consider himself of the common people. Lizzie Southworth is interested mainly in a new society editor for her sheet. The plot revolves around a returning service man and former small-town editor who puts over a story that his town had gone red, and goes on to tell how the commander falls for it.

The Spewacks may be granted a few bright and bizarre lines of comedy, enough, as noted, to make up a good revue skit. Unfortunately, a complete evening out is not built that way. The commander's eccentricities become wearing with repetition, and his office becomes a rce track, with actors diving for telephones and bringing messages. Presumably the authors' intention was to laugh out of countenance those people they naturally did not have in mind, but the satire is such broad burlesque it losses its point. Since the theatre is that way, there also is a love affair during the course of "Woman Bites Dog," and after the fashion of others' love affairs that slows everything down. The Spewacks' intentions were good; they need editing and a replate.

* * *

Taylor Holmes has himself a wonderful time as the Commander, who dresses now in academic robes, now in uniform, now for polio on a mechanical horse. Because of the script, he cannot make the publisher anything more than an absurdity, but he does that in full-face type. Royal Beal and Ann Shoemaker are the related publishers, the former being agreeable, the latter having little to do. Mercedes McCambridge, attractive and from radio, is half the love interest; Kirk Douglas supplies the rest. Frank Lovejoy is the Commander's editor and Eda Heinemann is the secretary, who replaces the telephone when the stage needs another jolt. Howard Bay's settings are correctly gaudy and full world. In short, almost everything is stet except the play. But a play is needed these days, and that "Woman Bites Dog" does not supply.

'WOMAN BITES DOG.'

A comedy by Bella and Samuel Spewack; staged by Coby Ruskin; settings by Howard Bay; costumes by Mary Grant; presented by Kermit Bloomgarden at the Belasco Theater, Wednesday evening, April 17, 1946. The cast:

Amanda Merkle	Eda Heinemann
Tony Flynn	Frank Lovejoy
Betsy Leon Kric	Himself
Commander Southworth	Taylor Holmes
Sims	E. G. Marshall
Wilson	Harold Grau
Betty Lord	Mercedes McCambridge
Major Southworth	Royal Beal
Lizzie Southworth	Ann Shoemaker
Hopkins	Kirk Douglas
First Attorney	Richard Clark
Second Attorney	Arthur Russell
Slim	Dudley Sadler
Waiter	Sam Donnell
Valet	Russell Morrison
Breckenridge	Robert Le Sueur
Maurice Crash	Maury Tuckerman
Sokonovski	Boris Kogan
Lee	John Miglio
Mayor Steven	Ed Nannery
Dean West	Roger Quinlan

SYNOPSIS: Act I—Office of the publisher of "The Herald." Time, the present. An April morning. Act II—Living room of Commander Southworth's suite at the Royal Hotel. That evening. Act III—Publisher's office. The next morning.

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 18, 1946

Spewacks Spoof Publishing Family

'Woman Bites Dog' Nips Vulnerable Heels of the Press

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

In "Woman Bites Dog," Bella and Samuel Spewack have used their expert farcical talent to give an atomic blasting to a certain way of American thinking. The comedy opened last night at the Belasco Theater.

For ludicrous dissection the authors pick a family of newspaper publishers, who wield tremendous power over public opinion, and give them a neat and special going over at the hands of a young veteran.

Cmdr. Southworth, uncompromisingly played by Taylor Holmes as an infantile egocentric, becomes the pivot of the hoax. He is the type who claims to have invented the atomic bomb, and who orders his secretary to have a baby when he discovers how many Asiatics there are in Asia. He has carried on journalistic war with England, Russia, Roosevelt and Washington.

A Gigantic Hoax.

As the young veteran, Hopkins, remarks, all this did not sound so good to a man in a foxhole. So for the edification of the Commander he invents an accomplished Communization of his own home town—something for the Commander to blast away at—with the idea that the old man will eventually be forced to tell some truth.

In true Spewack style, the reverberations of the plot multiply like a storehouse of fireworks. By the time the Commander discovers the deception, he is surrounded by an all-out mustering of his own forces.

His paper is blazoning the fantasy, the air is filled with cries of "Shame!" broadcast from a plane by a hysterical group of mothers, and the myth is being elaborated in the Senate.

In the course of this progression, the paper's strongest girl reporter has lost faith in her editor fiance, become the backbone of the Commander's belief in his scoop, and fallen for the instigator of the entire affair.

Lusty Opening.

The performance starts off with the momentum of a runaway steamroller coming down the Palisades. The cast, from the opening speech, leaves no doubt of anyone's intentions with its lusty delivery.

The second act calms down markedly as the plot thickens. By the last act no one is expected to recall by just what series of circumstances affairs have arrived where they are, and the plot proceeds to shoot itself to solution in an uproar.

"Woman Bites Dog," though it concerns timely political philosophy, never presumes to be intellectually stimulating. There is a kind of thinking and influence which the authors contemn. Instead of employing malicious satire they have decided to kick it around vigorously with ridicule.

As craftsmen they have made foremost use of their elements to amuse. They have contrived situations that pay more respect to the tumbling ahead of a comedy than they do to credibility. Their mechanics are frequently as complicated and rushing as a newspaper press in motion.

The Cast.

Occasionally one's laughter feels like nervous habit rather than the provocation of sharp wit. This is because some of the gags decapitate their elaborate build-up and the actors' gallant delivery.

The cast is an excellent one. Holmes is fiery and superficial as a mockery of a great citizen, and Royal Beal is dyspeptically strong as his cynical brother.

The female of the vain trio of publishers is made a fluttery egotist by Ann Shoemaker. Deft assurance and effective contrast are allotted the romantic triangle by Frank Lovejoy, Mercedes McCambridge and Kirk Douglas.

Some excellent smaller comic parts are handled to fine effect by Dudley Sadler as an innocent dupe, Eda Heinemann as the Commander's secretary, and E. G. Marshall as his idea man.

Howard Bey has graced the production with a pair of spectacularly appropriate settings, rich and reflective of the Commander's pretentiousness. Mary Grant gives the ladies effective clothes that they would likely wear, and even outdoes the mode of the day in Miss Shoemaker's hats.

"Woman Bites Dog"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

APRIL 18, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

News—but Not First Page

NEWSPAPER publishers are the fall guys in "Woman Bites Dog." This new Bella and Samuel Spewack comedy pulls few punches in caricaturing a journalistic dynasty. There is a minimum of fictional or coincidental cross-reference in the new Belasco offering. The authors combine indignation with wit in their satire. They have the benison of brilliant performances, ranging from Taylor Holmes's savage lampoon of an isolationist, Red-baiting gazette-owner, to Dudley Sadler's delightful impersonation of a bewildered veteran. When the play wabbles, as it frequently does, it is because the Spewacks are not throwing the punches that make a good kick in the pants good theatrical entertainment.

• • •

The truth is that "Woman Bites Dog" is as uneven as a piece of splintered wood. There are sharp prongs to the exposition, as a British-hating newspaper tycoon is lured into printing a palpable hoax by a crusading small-town editor, who celebrates the doffing of an air force uniform in his own peculiar fashion. The dialogue is sometimes on a par with that of "Born Yesterday." The characters, recognizable as most of them may be, are not quite substantial enough for three acts of kidding. The kidding itself veers from bright and amusing invective to the dullest sort of punning and phoney gestures. There is a lot of fun in the play, but it is fragmentary.

• • •

The chief characters in the pillory, in case you have been wondering, are two men and a woman who are related in more than blood. Each of them controls an important newspaper. Each of them is intent on making news something to reflect their personal foibles rather than the factual recording of events. When Commander Southworth is informed by a returned flyer that a small town in the heart of the country has gone Communistic, he swallows the yarn hook, line and sinker, as the flyer wished him to do. His extrication from the hoax constitutes the finale. There is a situation in "Woman Bites Dog." There is even an excuse for a shadowy romance. But the dramatic mainspring is not too strong.

Holmes dominates the acting as the Commander, bringing to the part a petulant egotism which is extremely amusing. Royal Beal, as a brother publisher, is very good indeed and Anne Shoemaker does what she can with a badly written part of a feminine newspaper owner, who is more interested in her society reporter than a Red invasion of America. Meanwhile Kirk Douglas is attractively brazen as the veteran who takes a big publisher over the hurdles. Mercedes McCambridge makes a comely and right-thinking heroine and the afore-mentioned Sadler gets laughs when the situations scarcely warrant them. Howard Bay's sets and Coby Ruskin's staging are first-rate. So much of "Woman Bites Dog" is first-rate that it is a pity that it is not more of a piece.

Journal my American

APRIL 18, 1946

'Woman Bites Dog' Opens at Belasco

By ROBERT GARLAND

The new one at the Belasco is a propaganda play. Its impotence as either propaganda or play is beside the point. The propaganda, which is first, is that any American citizen who does not believe that the Soviet Government is our most cooperative well-wisher, is a rabble rouser and a clown. The play, which is second, is a jerry-built contraption in which puppets pretend to be people.

Programs point out that the figures set up for knocking down in "Woman Bites Dog"—such is the piece's title—"are fictional, of course." This theory, propounded by Bella and Samuel Spewack, as authors, and Kermit Bloomgarden, as producer, came as a surprise to an expectant congregation foregathered to enjoy some good mean fun at the expense of a trio of high Fourth Estaters.

Well, such fun as is to be found stems from performances, not play. As Commander Southworth, who functions in Chicago; Major Southworth, who functions in New York, and Lizzie Southworth, who functions in Washington, Taylor Holmes, Royal Beal and Ann Shoemaker work long and loud. Only the first is successful. By interpolating the unrelated vaudeville act which has long been his, Mr. Holmes fights for his laughs—and gets three out of four of them!

• • •

Propaganda Bites Play

Not that there is no story beneath the propaganda at the Belasco. Boy meets girl in the ship-shaped office of Commander Southworth. Boy loses girl in the hotel-like suite of Commander Southworth. Boy keeps on losing girl back in the ship-shaped office of Commander Southworth. But a new boy gets her, the new boy who is a big-time flier, a small-town editor and a firm believer in Russia's cooperation. He doesn't even read his own paper!

Instead, he hides behind a friend named Hopkins. Going to the rabble-rousing clown set up to be knocked down by the Spewacks, he sells him a hoax about his home-town turning Communist while he has been flying in the face of fascism overseas. This cock and bull story, which even a drama critic can recognize as phony, is swallowed by the publisher, hook, line and stinker. What's more, he smears it all over the front page on the sayso of one fair, but false, reporter.

Such as it is, the play beneath the propaganda comes to an end in the middle of the evening at the Belasco. From then on, "Woman Bites Dog" is a desperate collection of gags and gadgets, with Taylor Holmes assigned to the greater part of them. Mr. Holmes is at one time asked to be funny while riding a mechanical horse supplied by Goodwin's Gymnasium, in polo costume supplied by Eaves Emporium. Even this does not unseat him!

• • •

Play Bites Propaganda

But "Woman Bites Dog" as play defeats "Woman Bites Dog" as propaganda, just as "Woman Bites Dog" as propaganda defeats "Woman Bites Dog" as play. Each seems sillier than the other. More unbelievable. Yet, by the gusto of his playing, Taylor Holmes manages frequently to be funny. He rides the Goodwins' mechanical horse and the Spewacks' mechanical situations with infectuous relish. I hate to think what the new one at the Belasco would be without him.

He is not too happy in his fellow players. Royal Beal is a more or less colorless Major Southworth, the New York brother. Ann Shoemaker is an entirely colorless Lizzie Southworth, the Washington sister. As the boy who loses girl, Frank Lovejoy is no blot upon the air waves from which he comes. As the boy who gets girl, Kirk Douglas is no blot upon the Amsterdam and Schenectady he looks upon as home. The Lizzie Southworth of Ann Shoemaker is merely hatty.

Mercedes McCambridge promises more than she fulfils as the girl the old boy loses and the new boy gets. Dudley Sadler contributes an amusing bit as Slim. Boris Kogan contributes a satiric bit as Sokonovski. Maury Tuckerman contributes a swishy bit as Crash. Howard Bay's two settings are better than the play deserves. So is a big beautiful dog known as Betsy Lous Eric . . . In itself, on its own, "Woman Bites Dog" is neither fresh, funny nor good Red propaganda.

New York Post

APRIL 18, 1946

'Woman Bites Dog' Satirizes Reactionary Publishers

By Vernon Rice

When it comes to writing stage lampoons, probably no one in the contemporary theatre can write with a more cutting and devastating pen than Bella and Samuel Spewack, once they've made up their minds to do it.

They lambasted the movies to a fare-you-well in "Boy Meets Girl." Now they've taken a reactionary newspaper publishing family for a ride in a farce, "Woman Bites Dog," which breezed into the Belasco last night like a head storm.

If the Spewacks don't like anything, they DON'T LIKE it, and their scorn is as gentle and as subtle as the roll's from Gene Krupa's snare drum.

Guess Who

At the end of the program it is stated, "The characters in the play are fictional, of course."

A good many Broadway wiseacres will be saying today, "Oh yeah?"

Be that as it may. The Spewacks turn their justifiable rage on this fictional publishing family consisting of one brother, who fumes at the mere mention of red; another brother, a dreamer turned cynic and die-hard Republican, and a female cousin, who puts emphasis on crazy hats and society reporting. Each has a newspaper.

Into their lives come a couple of ex-Air Corps lieutenants with a tale of horror about what has happened to their old hometown of Danville while they were off to the war.

It has turned Communistic, it seems.

To Danville is rushed the best woman reporter on the red-baiting publisher's staff, who finds about the only thing red the populace of Danville subscribes to is the Red Cross.

She returns ready to expose the hoax, but because of a disappointing love-affair with the paper's editor, she gets tight and writes the story the publisher wants.

Madness rages from thereon out. We're not the one to ruin excellent third-act gags, so you'll have to see the show for yourselves to find out what happens, as far as we are concerned.

Good Farce Direction

Coby Ruskin directed the play with good old farce whirlwind technique and the players fell into line, playing with race horse speed.

Taylor Holmes, in the role of Commander Southworth, the red-hater, came out the winner, but with Royal Beal and Ann Shoemaker coming in almost on the nose as Major and Lizzie Southworth, his brother and cousin, respectively. All three are experts at this sort of thing, so they were perfectly at home in the satire of "Woman Bites Dog."

Frank Lovejoy, as Tony Flynn, the editor; Mercedes McCambridge playing Betty Lord, the girl reporter; and Kirk Douglas and Dudley Sadler enacting the roles of the two aviators, Hopkins and Slim, all were in the running.

Howard Bay provided two sets that were appropriate as well as eye-filling.

Had the Spewacks provided situations as hilarious as their dialogue and gags, "Woman Bites Dog" would have been a knockout farce. With the present scarcity of farces, however, we shall be content with this until a better one comes along.

PM

APRIL 19, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Not Much Of a Bite

PM Reviews

The Spewacks' new play deals with a family of newspaper owners, two gents and a lady. One of the breed was pretty liberal in his youth, but all three are now rock-ribbed and rock-heaving reactionaries, anti-Russian, anti-British, anti-Asiatic, anti-New Deal, and generally antediluvian. The program describes them as "fictional," but for some odd reason this precise family set-up has for a long time clamored for treatment.

I could wish, however, that the Spewacks had treated it a whole lot better. Having dreamed up their three Southworths, they haven't quite known what to do with them. As comedy writers, the Spewacks very soundly avoided doing anything too serious with them; but the panting farce plot and burlesque characters they hit upon add up to too little as either commentary or comedy. The difficulties of the plot and the characterizations play, in fact, into each other's hands. Since the characters are so very broadly drawn, they cannot really function as human beings, and must be jerked into action by a plot that depends for its fun on sheer farcical verve; and of that verve there is very little.

• • •

It is Middlewestern Commander Southworth who is the most important and most amusing of the clan: an isolationist egomaniac who imagines he has thought up most of the world's greatest inventions and who would like to be President. Seeing Red in all directions, he is easily hoaxed by a liberal young lieutenant who announces that his home town has gone completely Communist. The Commander sends his star girl reporter to cover the story; and she, hostile to the Commander's policies, perpetuates the hoax by writing it all up as true. Commotion follows; and at the end the Commander can get himself off the hooks only by letting the girl and the lieutenant off, too.

This little farce plot has scarcely the stamina to hold up for three acts; and in *Woman Bites Dog*, furthermore, it has an obvious absurdity without enough saving farce screwiness. I think the Spewacks would have got more real sting and satire into their play if they had concentrated on Southworth skullduggery or Southworth family squabbles. But if they were using the plot they did, they should have used it for all it was worth: should have plunged the Commander himself into the life of the "Communist" town, and kept things moving fast, furious and smoking hot. In *Woman Bites Dog*, however, the doings are merely reported on with a lot of telephone calls and messenger service, and are padded with a lot of utterly routine love interest.

• • •

What *Woman Bites Dog* has to fall back on are its gags and its Southworths, and they are not enough. The family trio, who spend their spare time doublecrossing one another, range from good to nothing at all. The fantastic Commander, well played with a mild suggestion of madness by Taylor Holmes, is the best thing in the show. But his sharp, sour brother the Major (Royal Beal) is no more than a passable straight character; and Lizzie Southworth (Ann Shoemaker) is a complete washout. As for the gags, some of them have sharp points and a few are funny. But they have a ding-donging lack of variety; and glad as I was to see people like the Southworths taken for a ride, I wish it had not been round and round the same track. In general, I'm afraid that the Spewacks have fumbled a good thing. *Woman Bites Dog* does not, like *Born Yesterday* and *State of the Union*, fuse social criticism with lively entertainment.

Mr. Ruskin's direction is brisk enough, and Howard Bay's sets catch the right note. No one in the cast but Mr. Holmes, however, is anything more than competent.

—Louis Kronenberger.